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Prevention of

INFANT MORTALITY: A RACE SUICIDE IS NOT SO
MUCH A QUESTION OF MORE BIRTHS AS
OF LESS DEATHS.

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THE subject of infant mortality is a very painful one to me, and it has been the chief study of my life for many years past. Forty-two years ago, at the age of 26, I married a healthy girl of 22. Our three children all died, the eldest at five. Our family doctor was one of the finest of men, honorable, sympathetic, and conscientious; but as I have come to know, his knowledge of the hygiene of infancy and of how to conserve life was practically *nil*. It was this sad experience that impelled me to undertake the study of medicine. In scanning the mortality reports from week to week I found that on the average about one-third of all deaths were of children under five, and that about two-thirds of these were of infants under one year. During the heated term of summer the proportion of infants and children dying was still greater. As I noted the way in which the little ones everywhere were treated I found that it was on the same order observed in my first family, and I finally concluded that it must be fearfully wrong. During the past twenty-five years of very busy practice, I have proved over and over again the truth of that conclusion. Why should we imagine that even the brightest and in general most capable girl could, from simply getting married and having a baby, become at once the mistress of all wisdom as to the nature and needs of new-born infants? But, the family doctor! Speaking generally, it would be about all his practice was worth to insist upon any radical change in the prevailing manner of dressing and feeding the baby; matters that the mother, grandmother and nurse regard as their own affair, and he would thus be handicapped, even supposing him to possess all wisdom along these lines. As I remember our old family doctor never sought to dictate in these matters. He had perhaps learned from experi-



ence, as I have since, that only those parents who have suffered the loss of children are anxious to learn and adopt better methods; although he was a frequent visitor, our babies were stuffed and flannelled to a finish, just as is still going on all around us. Young mothers have no wise teaching as to the proper management of their little ones, and it seems almost as though the middle-aged and older women learn little from experience. Many mothers make it a question of "playing doll" with their babies, and like the little girl with her make-believe baby they try to see how much clothing they can pile on, making very little difference between summer and winter garb; and, as for that, we might well consider that in hot, and usually over-hot rooms it is practically "summer" all the year round and, consequently, that these little naturally naked animals should be very lightly draped at all times except when exposed to the cold. As it is, however, the skin is sweltered and, although a true breathing organ, it is "smothered"; and the hotter the weather and the longer it lasts the heavier the mortality. Of course, bad and over feeding plays its part in this havoc. Babies are apt to be fed as freely in hot, as in cold weather, although none of us at any age can digest and assimilate anything like as much food in summer as in winter; and besides this, adults as a rule, use a very much modified diet in summer, having all the seasonable fruits to fill up with, and this gives grown people a great advantage over babies, especially bottle babies. Another point: babies are kept too much in arms; they are not allowed enough freedom to sprawl and kick and strike out on rug and lawn, their outings being almost exclusively in the baby carriage, sitting bolt upright—an altogether unnatural and mischievous position—and for want of enough natural exercise of arms and chest they don't half breathe; and the muffled skin doesn't breathe at all, and hence there is to a degree actual oxygen starvation. It is of course all the worse if the living and sleeping rooms are over-warm and insufficiently ventilated. If mothers were really wise along these lines their healthy-born babies would have scarcely a higher death rate than kittens and puppies that only die from drowning.

It is not more births but less deaths that is needed

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to prevent all danger of race suicide. Nor, in my opinion, will cooking the baby's milk tend in any degree to promote its health; far from it, since milk is thereby made less nutritious, as is true of all foods that are agreeable in their natural state. As for the digestibility of cooked as compared with raw milk, it should be more generally known that the stomach, like every other organ, requires exercise in order to maintain its normal vigor. To use it merely as a tunnel for sluicing either undigested or "pre-digested" food substances into the intestines is to enfeeble that organ and to promote danger of blood-poisoning from the absorption of putrescent material into the circulation.

My present family consists of wife and five children, the children from five to sixteen years old, and none came anywhere near dying either in infancy or since, having been reared on quite contrary lines from what proved so disastrous with the children of my first wife, who herself fell a victim to the same general lack of hygienic knowledge on my part. During the first ten or twelve years of their life they were always barefooted all the year round, indoors, and during spring, summer and fall, outdoors. In infancy during the hottest of summer weather they were kept much of the time naked, and always scantily draped while indoors. None of them ever wore flannel underwear, never a belly-band, nor was ever one of them diapered in the sweltering way still in vogue with young infants. Our way of feeding (they were nourished by the breast up till twenty to twenty-two months) and managing made diapers practically unnecessary, except when going abroad during the day. Several diapers placed appropriately better guarded the bed from wetting than when used in the ordinary way, and were more readily changed. The newcomer was placed on its belly in cotton nightgown on a hard hair mattress, no pillow; none was ever put on its back for any length of time, day or night. None was ever in the sitting posture, except for brief periods in the carriage, until well along in months, nor even then encouraged to sit very much. They all crept at a very early age, having been unhampered by clothing and given full chance on the rug much of the time when out of bed. Our oldest, a daughter, now in her seventeenth year, five feet eight inches, 125 lbs., crept at seven weeks.

At four to six months they were all climbing upstairs and backing down, the latter trick having been taught them as soon as they reached the point of climbing up. I came near getting into trouble with this young lady during her first summer. I would often bring her down to the sitting-room in the "altogether" for the entertainment of our visitors during June, July and August (she was born June 14th); and it chanced that one dear humane lady who had heard about my brutal treatment of the dear babe visited Father Fay of the S. P. C. C., here, and entered a complaint against me. The dear old lover of children listened calmly to the story, and then reached for a copy of my book on Babies ("How to Feed the Baby," etc.), and turning to the appropriate page, read the dedication, "To the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children," and quietly assured his visitor that if Dr. Page's baby got frost-bitten during the summer he would have him taken care of! Our babies were weaned on cows' milk, raw, and Persian dates; at first a single date after the bottle portion. As children the chief part of all their nourishment has been derived from nuts, dates, figs, bananas, and the various juicy fruits according to season, and this is at present the chief part of the diet of us all. The children have always been remarkably free from "colds," catarrhal troubles, digestive disturbances, etc., etc. It is my firm belief that there isn't another family of children in the wide world that enjoy eating, that take their three meals a day, and every day, with such pleasure and satisfaction as this Page quintette, unless they are fed on the same principle. They have no catarrh nor bowel troubles, and the fecal dejections are not malodorous from putrefaction of cooked stuff, as is so common with meat and mush eaters, and so suggestive of blood-poisoning (autotoxemia), "malaria," typhoid fever, etc., etc. Again, in feeding them on what I esteem the natural diet they eat naturally, requiring no nagging as to the way to eat; no "don't eat so fast," "chew your food," etc., which is so agonizing to both parents and children when it is a question of the ordinary food, as the cereal and vegetable mushes, bread and butter, etc. But this is going deeper into the question of dietetics than I had in mind at the opening of this paper.

None of our children has ever slept in a shut-windowed bedroom, be sure; nor are our living-rooms ever closed to the free ingress of fresh air, as we all hold to the doctrine formulated by Dr. Felix Oswald as follows: "To save foul air for the sake of its warmth is poor economy." It has been my good fortune to help many mothers rear their babies in comfort and health, not alone in the ordinary capacity of family physician, but by correspondence all over the country and even in England, the little book which has been selling in large editions during the past twenty-five years being the cause of this unusual state of affairs. The chief points to give a babe a fair chance for its life are, light drapery, allowing perfect freedom of limb, with full opportunities for natural exercise on all fours; avoidance of vaccination and every other form of blood-poison; food to the extent of the child's capacity for digestion and assimilation, but nothing for mere fatness. All healthy younglings remain throughout the growing age slender; we observe this everywhere. Kittens, puppies, calves, and even pigs are examples of this law. The farmer who understands the secret of raising the biggest hogs never allows the growing pig to become fat; "it stunts his growth," he is apt to say. Other things equal it is the fat baby that melts away and dies and not the slender one, during its second summer.

It is, of course, universally known that the only natural diet of the human infant, and the diet that gives it a strictly fair chance to thrive, is the breast. I believe that the great majority of mothers really desire to nurse their babies, and many more of them would be able to if more natural treatment were accorded them. One grand mistake is very generally made, as it appears to me, that of compelling the mother to remain in bed for a stipulated time, usually about two weeks. It often happens that a mother who feels equal to being up and about in a few days, sometimes even on the second day, is enfeebled by being treated as a bed-ridden sick woman and can with difficulty rise from bed after a fortnight or more of this enforced invalidism. Lying flat on the back, itself an altogether unnatural position, bereft of all exercise, and usually the victim of forced-feeding, like the dairyman's cows "driven" for a big yield of milk,

it is not surprising to the thoughtful student of this question that so many mothers finally have to forego the pleasure of nursing their babes because of "complications" for which this mistaken regimen is to blame. One intelligent physician has recently made reference to the malposition above named as altogether bad for drainage, and to my mind this is a point well worth considering.

The value of the barefoot practice is scarcely appreciated by even its advocates, excepting as relates to the very small minority, while physicians generally have no sort of comprehension of it. It had a great boom through the influence of Fr. Kneipp, the old priest of Worres-hoffen, Bavaria, a few years ago, when such men as Baron Rothschild, the eminent banker, and such women as the Empress of Austria, took the "treatment," including rigid diet, obtaining great benefit therefrom, the one for rheumatic gout, and the other for torturous neuralgia. Here and there some society woman adopts it as a fad for her young children; they look "so cunning" with their pretty limbs free from hosiery. But common folk haven't the courage to face the public with unshod young ones, more's the pity. Following the example set by my small children nearly all the families on our street have tumbled to the fashion, and already they have observed ample proof of my contention that it promotes health in general and particular. One little girl was on the point of being submitted to an operation for adenoids by her mother; her condition was really pitiful in the extreme. Just in season through my insistence the sufferer was turned out all weathers barefooted, and in a comparatively short time the trouble has disappeared. One other case somewhat similar, on the street, was likewise "cured." Verily, Nature is the grand healer, only asking the doctor to remove the trigs from her wheels and, in needed cases, bring to bear certain potent natural aids, as regulated diet, appropriate hydrotherapy, etc., etc.

The experience of Dr. Thomms, a physician with the missionaries in Turkey-in-Asia, comes to my mind as related by him in a thoughtful article in a medical journal some years ago. His observations covered a period of upwards of a quarter of a century.

"When I first went out there," he writes, "the sight of the native children without shoes or stockings, their

feet often blue with cold, used almost to break my heart. But, as the years went by and I never had a case of diphtheria or serious sore throat except among the well-shod and stockinged children of the missionaries I came to view the matter in a different light; and I became a strong advocate of the theory advanced by an old friend of mine in the profession, that 'diphtheria is a disease of stinking feet,' to use his rather inelegant expression." Of all the disgusting odors that ever outrage one's olfactories, none quite equals that given off by the toes of a foot just released from its wool and leather prison, although under normal conditions the feet and toes are as sweet as the hands and fingers. On a steam train running into Baltimore on one cold November afternoon a 12-year-old lad was observed dropping off at way stations and clipping along the frosty platforms in bare feet. He was one of a group consisting of three, mother, sister and himself, and all the on-lookers wondered at the sight. The two women were elegantly gowned and the boy's garb also indicated well-to-do folk. A newspaper man made bold to accost the elder woman and with proper apologies asked the solution of the problem that was exciting the curiosity of every one in the car, and doubtless the disgust and anxiety of not a few. She proved to be the wife of a Baltimore physician, and she explained that their first three children all died of diphtheria, and that her husband finally came to the conclusion that the chief cause was boots and stockings. The next little one that came along was never shod and he throve finely; and the same with the second, the daughter present, and number three, the barefooted boy whose feet seemed entirely indifferent to cold. We have here in Boston another Back Bay physician whose several children have been treated as have mine, and with equally good results.

Clothing: Except when it is a question of guarding the young one from actual cold we should consider its covering as drapery only, and make it as light and of as few layers as possible, so as not to impede its movements of body and limbs nor the free exchange of carbonic acid for oxygen which goes on wherever the blood-vessels of the skin are in contact with the air. I learned long ago that it is safer for any of us, old or young, to be too cold than too hot—to shiver than to sweat—and that the skin's natural physical

culture is properly regulated shocks of cold and heat. The more frail and delicate the new born babe the more essential it is to understand and practice this principle. The more robust ones may stagger along under an excessive burden of food and flannels and make a live of it, finally, though even these are, as we all know, subject to what we have come to regard as almost necessary "infantile diseases," but which in days to come will be regarded as disgraceful to physician and attendants. Sir Frederick Treves said the other day (as cabled over from London): "I look forward to the time when the people will leave off the extraordinary practice of taking medicine when they are sick, and when it will be as anomalous for a person to die of scarlet fever, measles or diphtheria as of a wolf bite in London!"

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